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SUBJECT: COMOROS RESHUFFLE PORTENDS FEW CHANGES

REFTEL: ANTANANARIVO 479

**¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY:** On July 10, Union of the Comoros President Ahmed Abdallah Sambi reshuffled his cabinet with only minor changes. Main embassy interlocutors remained largely the same, with the exception of Abdourahim Bacar, who was downgraded from Minister of Education to Minister of Post and Telecommunications. Although the reason for the reshuffle is unclear, no doubt Sambi hopes the changes will bring a breath of fresh air at a time when his street popularity is waning and malaise is on the rise (reftel). END SUMMARY.

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THE LINEUP

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**¶12. (U)** Main embassy interlocutors remained largely the same, including:

-- Idi Nadhoim, Vice President (representing the island of Grande Comore) with responsibility for Transport and Tourism (although he loses the Post and Telecommunications portfolio, reportedly due to his poor personal relationship with the Director General of the Comores Telecom telecommunications company)

-- Ikililou Dhoinine, Vice President (representing the island of Moheli) with responsibility for Health, Solidarity and the Promotion of Gender

-- Ahmed Ben Said Jaffar, Foreign Minister

-- Mohamed Bacar Abdou Dossar, Chief of Cabinet with responsibility for Territorial Defense and Safety (Minister of Defense)

**¶13. (U)** In a significant change, Abdourahim Bacar, a strong Embassy contact and former Peace Corps employee, is leaving his post as Minister of Education to assume the newly created (and much less powerful) position of Minister of Post and Telecommunications, although he remains the Government Spokesman. The reason for this apparent demotion is unclear. Mourad Said Ibrahim is also being demoted from his post as Minister of Justice to a general ministerial position within the Presidency in charge of Institutional Reform and the Control of State Accounts. To replace Ibrahim, the portfolio of Mmadi Ali, until now the Minister of Islamic Affairs with responsibility for the organization of elections, has expanded to include Justice, the Penitentiary Administration, and the Relationship with Parliament and Domestic Institutions. Sambi critics depict Ibrahim's demotion as a result of his refusals to comply with the President's "illegal" and politically-motivated decisions, while Sambi supporters applaud the President's attempt to regain control of the corrupt judiciary.

Sitti Kassim loses her post as Minister of Agriculture, Fishing and the Environment but stays in the government (and remains the only woman) in a sub-ministerial position in charge of Gender and Solidarity.

¶4. (U) Dropped completely from the government were Hassan Hamadi, Minister of Finance and Budget, and Nailana Mahadji, Minister of Energy, Mines, Industry and Artisanal Works.

¶5. (U) The Cabinet has been enlarged with seven new ministers, off-setting the two dropped and two demoted.

-- Mohamed Ali Soilihi, Finance and Budget

-- Anissi Chamsidine, Agriculture, Fisheries and Environment - potentially a very important position given the primacy of agriculture in the Comoran economy (and the current global food problem) but he is believed to have little experience in the field.

-- Dr. Kamaliddine Afraitan, Education -- a biologist by training who most recently headed the Department of Research at the University of the Comoros. He has a reputation for being a serious person and a hard worker.

-- Mohamed Larif Oukacha, Land Management, Housing and Urban Development

-- Houmadi Abdallah, Energy, Mines and Industry

-- Ahmed Abdou, Administrative Reform and Human Rights

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-- Said Attoumane, Economy, Commerce, Labor and Investment Promotion

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WHY NOW?  
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¶6. (SBU) Political observers have speculated on several reasons for the recent cabinet shuffle. Amid persistent street rumors that Sambi is increasingly losing control of his government, some are calling this the President's warning for his ministers to "fall in line." Sambi's increasing loss of popularity is often blamed on poor decisions taken under the advice of misguided or ill-intentioned advisors; the reshuffle is also likely an attempt to reorient his administration in its remaining two years. Critics say he demoted or dismissed those unwilling to carry out certain "illegal" decisions masked as political directives, designed to benefit himself, his supporters, and his "Shiite agenda." Still others say the shuffle is the logical follow-up to the recent restoration of order on Anjouan; a large coalition of political parties and organizations who supported the military intervention expected to be rewarded with greater representation in the government.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: Whatever the reason for the reshuffle, it is clear that President Sambi is sorely in need of change, with his popularity waning and malaise on the rise. Still, the cabinet changes appear to be relatively minor, and were announced just before Sambi departed on his visit to Washington, presumably before he could issue detailed "marching orders" for his new team. Washington interlocutors might want to probe how (and if) the Cabinet changes are related to the inter-Comoran dialogue set to be launched now that the Anjouan Island elections have been successfully concluded. END COMMENT.

SIBLEY